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Theoretical and practice errors at elementary art education

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Abstract

This study explores teachers' opinions in order to identify problems prevailing in Visual Arts courses in primary schools. This study is a qualitative one fulfilled by means of the interview method. The sampling of this study comprises 10 Visual Arts teachers working in elementary schools in the central province of Kastamonu. The surveyor employed interview questions developed by himself as a data collection tool. Among the survey findings, some problems were observed in the Visual Arts courses in primary schools. Generally, those problems stem from mainly the policy of education, educational programmes, administrators, inadequacies of the environment and physical structure of schools in question.

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1. Introduction

The world known great Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk fully explained the importance of art in his saying, "Success in the fine arts is the surest sign that all the reforms have been successful. It is a shame for those nations that failed to progress in this field. It is because, despite all their accomplishments, they fall far short of achieving recognition for their higher humanitarian qualities". Art is a product of thought and problem solving (Amheim, 1960). Maintaining its importance, art, as a means humans employ to express themselves, has reached the dimension of education in today's world.

Art education enables individuals to be aware of their own feelings and imagination. (Eisner, 1994). Art education occupies an important place in students' self-development. However, art education and teaching which has been in constant and innovative progress in the world tends to avoid the field of practice and turn towards theoretical knowledge in Turkey; thus, it is decreasing in importance. Studies formerly carried out show that the problems of Visual Arts Teaching in Turkey arise from the inconsistency between the course title and its content, insufficient number of courses in the curriculum, inadequacies of teachers and physical conditions, the number of students in classrooms and economic problems (Aykut, 2006). Primary school art education is seen not compatible with teaching principles, student levels, environmental features and the objectives of Turkish National Education.

Studies obviously show that Turkish Art education has some problems. This paper aims to present the opinions of elementary school teachers and the problems occurring in Visual Arts courses hoping to contribute to the field literature.

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2. Method

This part of the study includes method, sample, and assessment tool and data analysis.

2.1. Method and Sample

The study is a qualitative survey conducted by the interview method. Interview method enables an insight through unobservable situations such as experiences, believes, attitudes, thoughts, intentions, comments, mental perceptions and reactions (Yildirim and Simsek, 2006). This survey aims to make a profound analysis of problems occurring in Visual Art Courses in primary schools.

Parallel with the survey's objective, survey population is composed of a total number of 546 teachers in 21 schools of Kastamonu province. The survey sample, on the other hand, involves 12 teachers working in 2 primary schools selected by simple random sampling. In the interviews held according to the principle of voluntariness, 2 of the teachers rejected to participate; thus, 10 teachers helped to complete the study.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

This study makes use of semi structured interview method. The reason why such a method is employed is that questions were previously prepared and it allows flexibility in questions. In this method, the surveyor prepares questions beforehand; however, he provides the interviewees with flexibility up to an extent allowing reformulation and discussion of questions (Ekiz, 2003). Accordingly, interview questions were prepared based on the literature. Interview questions are composed of 4 main questions and sub- questions included in three of them. An expert's opinion is asked regarding the validity and reliability of the interview questions.

3. Findings

The first question to the teachers in the sampling was: "What do you think of Visual Arts course" as well as the sub- questions such as "How many hours do you teach every week?" "What is the undergraduate program you graduated from?", "Do you follow a periodical on art education?" "Have you held an exhibition ever since you started your career? Table 1 composed of the answers given is shown below.

Table 1. Teachers' answers to the question "What do you think of Visual Arts course?" and its sub-questions

	Answers	f
Teachers' opinions on Visual Arts courses	Courses inspire students with love of art	5
	Courses facilitate students to express themselves and be motivated.	6
	Visual Arts course activities are enjoyable for students.	4
	Visual Arts course is related with other courses.	7
	Visual Arts course is important	10
Undergraduate programs teachers graduated from	I am a graduate of the Faculty of Education Visual Arts Teaching Department	8
	I am a graduate of Faculty of Fine Arts Painting Department	2
Following periodicals	I always follow an art periodical	1
	I do not follow any periodicals	9
Whether they have held an exhibition	I have taken part in group exhibitions.	3
	I have not taken part in any exhibitions.	6
	I have held my own exhibition.	1

All of the interviewees think Visual Arts course is important for students' education and the majority of them believe students find those courses enjoyable, they facilitate them to express themselves; furthermore, Visual Art course is directly related with other courses rather than being an isolated one. Participants teach 17 hours at average every week. All these interviewees are graduates of the Faculty of Education Visual Arts Teaching Department, which means they have the required pedagogical training to teach Painting. Almost none of the interviewees follow a periodical on education of art. Some of those who do not follow any periodicals explain their reasons for this practice as the inadequacies of their environment. For instance, K3, one of the interviewees says: I cannot find any

periodicals to read in the town I work. More than half of the interviewees have not attempted to hold an exhibition ever since they started their careers. One of the interviewees in this group explains the reason behind: “For me, it is almost impossible to find the necessary psychological and physical support to open an exhibition.” Another person in this group, K5 says: “I do not have enough free time to work on holding an exhibition, nor do I find support for that purpose.”

The second question to the teachers was: “How is your students’ attitude towards your Visual Arts classes?” as well as sub-questions such as “How is the general class attitude during lessons?”, “What do you think is the level of the class’ meeting its objectives?” “What do you think is the success criteria in Visual Arts classes?” The answers to the second question are shown in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. Teachers’ answers to the question “How is your students’ attitude towards Visual Arts class? and its sub-questions

Answers		f
Students’ attitude towards Visual Arts courses	My students ignore Visual Arts class.	6
	My students like Visual Arts class.	4
	My students are interested in Visual Arts class.	4
In-class situation	In-class atmosphere is democratic and free	1
	There exists a chaos during in-class activities	7
	Courses become productive when all of the students participate	2
Visual Arts course’s level of meeting objectives	The class meets its objectives.	1
	I do not think the class meets its objectives	9
	The success criterion is students’ pleasure while painting	5
The success criteria in Visual Arts class	The success criterion is to meet curricular objectives.	2
	It is wrong to grade students in painting classes.	9
	There is no success criteria for painting classes.	3

More than half of the interviewees stated that their students ignore Visual Arts course; however, some of them think their students take interest in the course in question and like it. K2 and K9, two interviewees in the first group say: “students are generally not interested in the class; however, the reason is the education system which depends on examination at the Second Stage of Elementary Education. The majority of the interviewees say that they have a chaotic atmosphere in the classroom during classes. The interviewee K9: “Classes generally finish even before we prepare materials necessary for the class. If we achieve to prepare materials, then classes finish before students are able to complete their works. It means a constant rush and chaos in the class.” K4, on the other hand, says: “We do not have suitable classrooms and the required substructure for painting activities. In that case, it becomes impossible to manage the whole class or conduct coordinated works with students. Such an atmosphere helps to create chaos.” Almost all of the interviewees believe that Visual Arts course does not meet the objectives. K6 and K7 explain the same situation: “Courses fail to meet the objectives due to some reasons such as insufficiency of materials and class hours. While half of the interviewees determine the success criterion of Painting courses as the pleasure students get while painting, some of the rest specify it as meeting curricular objectives; however, some others do not think there can be a success criterion. One of those in the last group, K10 justifies his opinion in this way: “There is no success criterion for Visual Arts courses since painting is a matter of capability. All of the teachers are displeased with the fact that Painting courses are graded.

The third question asked to the teachers was “What do you think of your school’s physical conditions?” together with sub-questions such as “What do you think of Visual Arts curriculum for Elementary Education?” “What do you think of weekly course hours of Visual Arts?” What is your opinion regarding the effect of your school and surroundings on Visual Arts course practices? The answers given to the third question are below given in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers answers to the question “What do you think of your school’s physical conditions?” and its sub-questions

Answers		f
Physical Conditions of Teachers’ Schools	My school’s physical conditions are sufficient for the course.	3
	My school’s physical conditions are insufficient for the course .	7
Visual Arts Curriculum for	The curriculum is restrictive.	8

Elementary Education	Course subjects and hours allocated for them are not compatible.	4
	The curriculum is satisfactory.	2
Weekly course hours of Visual Arts	Weekly course hours are insufficient.	10
The effect of school and surroundings on the course	Social surroundings' attitude towards painting has a negative effect on the course.	6
	Lack of facilities in the environment affects the course negatively.	7
	The environment has no influence on the course.	3

The majority of the interviewees find their schools' physical conditions insufficient due to the lack of painting workshop and materials. Whereas nearly all of them agree that the curriculum is restrictive, all of them think that course hours are not enough for the curriculum. The interviewee teachers are predominantly of the opinion that their social environment affects the course in a negative way. The interviewee K1, for instance: "Parents and society in general consider painting activities as a forced task. K6, on the other hand, "According to the curriculum, we are expected to visit museums in the towns we live, but I do not work in such a place and this situation restricts my lessons.

The fourth question asked to the teachers was "Generally, what do you think of the position Visual Arts course has in Elementary education program?". The table 4 composed of the given answers is below given.

Table 4. Teachers' answers to the question "Generally, what do you think of the position Visual Arts course occupies in Elementary education program?"

Answers	f
Visual Arts courses are not paid much attention to due to the examination system	9
Painting class is considered only as a compulsion.	6
Painting class is very important.	10

All of the interviewees are of the opinion that painting course is important, but nearly all of them believe that this class is not much valued because the education system depends on exams; that's why, that course is considered as a compulsion. The interviewee K3 and K1 say, "There exists a problem in the system. Because painting course is not graded in any exams, it prevents us from drawing the attention to the problems and then eliminating the drawbacks schools suffer from.

4. Outcomes and Suggestions

4.1. Outcomes

It is clear, by means of this survey, that central Elementary schools in Kastamonu have problems with Visual Arts courses.

In the light of the findings we obtained, we are able to say that 90% of the participant teachers do not follow a periodical on art, nor do take part in activities related with art; 60% of them, on the other hand, have not been involved in any artistic works or held any exhibitions. These data show very serious rates since it is essential for a teacher of Painting course to follow periodicals in his/her own field, update himself/herself as well as to get involved in artistic activities. It is worthy of note that teachers attempt to justify this negativity by environmental inadequacies. It is obviously seen that Turkish Education system fails to support the teachers in professional terms. This outcome is parallel with those of Katırcı (2003).

In the survey, 60% of the students are discovered not paying attention to Visual Arts classes. 90% of the teachers think that the course fails to meet the objectives, and 70% of them say that there occurs a chaos during classes. The reason for the aforementioned problems is given as the insufficiency of workshops and materials at schools. This finding shows consistency with those of Arisoy (1994). However, the case for Science and Technology course, which is another course like Visual Arts requiring a special training field among the elementary education courses, is just the opposite. According to the findings of Bozdoğan and Yalçın (2004), approximately all schools have laboratories. This result brings us to the conclusion that Visual Arts course, in contrast to Science and Technology

course, is not much valued as it is not involved in the examination system. This lack of attention to Visual Arts course, as the survey results suggest, can be considered as an explanation of the fact that 90% of the teachers stated Visual Arts course was considered unimportant.

70% of the teachers found the curriculum restrictive and deficient, and weekly course hours incompatible with the number of course subjects. Those findings comply with those of Arısoy (1994) and Özbudun (1995). Since the years 1997 and 1998, Visual Arts courses have been taught for one hour each week. Although, it was suggested that Visual Arts courses should be taught for two hours weekly in the reports of Working Group for The Development of Visual Arts Education in Turkey (1983) and Specialization Commission for the Development of Visual Arts Education (1991), there has been no implementation regarding this subject.

4.2. Suggestions

Teachers' opinions indicate that teaching Visual Arts course, which is a part of the Turkish education system, has some problems. It is necessary to be aware of the problem and to carry out realistic works in order to solve it. The first goal should be to change the prejudices of people considering this course a compulsion since it is as significant as other main courses.

There should be physical improvement works planned for schools. Same facilities and opportunities should be provided for every region and school.

The distribution of course subjects in the curriculum needs to be revised. Teachers should be provided with more freedom as course planning is very easily affected by regional differences and facilities.

Practices which encourage students to participate in artistic activities are highly recommended along with taking the drawbacks teachers encounter in their workplaces into consideration.

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